

cocci by handydandynotebook

Series: apparently i take requests now and nothing is a one-shot anymore [3]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Relationships: Billy Hargrove & Neil Hargrove

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Summary:

Billy wants to put it off but he doesn't. Because if he puts it off for too long, he's not going to go to Neil at all. He's going to lose his nerve. So he drives back home in time for dinner, spitting swears between the coughs and smacking at the steering wheel in frustration.

"What did we talk about?" Neil eyes him suspiciously when he steps into the kitchen.

"No biohazards by the food, yeah, I know," he mumbles, combs the damp fringe out of his eyes.

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Author's Note:

- For Spurius.

request for Spurius! how it would've went in arbitrio if neil was still alive when billy got home n approached him for help.

uh, idk if u rly gotta read arbitrio for this to make sense?? prolly not. it'd prolly enhance ur understanding of things not outright stated in the fic (tot acerba funera too) but tbh, i think it'll still make enough sense even without having read those. it's like...solid enough as is, it's short. so.

Billy is sorely tempted to put off going to Neil for as long as he can. He doesn't want to go to Neil at all. He'd rather have a root canal on every tooth than go to his bastard father for anything. But...he's starting to have trouble breathing...his chest hurts...seems like it's probably worse than common cold stuff. If it was just a case of the sniffles, he probably could've shook it off by now.

Fuck everything.

Billy wants to put it off but he doesn't. Because if he puts it off for too long, he's not going to go to Neil at all. He's going to lose his nerve. So he drives back home in time for dinner, spitting swears between the coughs and smacking at the steering wheel in frustration.

“What did we talk about?” Neil eyes him suspiciously when he steps into the kitchen.

“No biohazards by the food, yeah, I know,” he mumbles, combs the damp fringe in his face out of his eyes.

“Are you being a smart aleck?”

“No...no, sir, I just...” Billy strains to suppress the coughs he can feel

coming on, uncomfortable scratching in the back of his throat.

Everyone's looking at him now. Max frowning, that thin red cut standing out against her pale skin. Susan's dressed a little fancier than normal, wearing this sweater dress Neil bought her for Christmas, finger restlessly tracing the rim of her wineglass, almost like she's anxious. Maybe Billy's the one making her anxious, breathing his biohazard bacteria five feet apart from her artistically arranged dinner table. Well, she and Neil have nothing to worry about, frankly just looking at food is unappealing. Billy has no desire whatsoever to sit with them and stuff his face.

"Billy, are those the same clothes you wore yesterday?" Neil asks suddenly, narrowing his eyes.

They are. The last time Billy changed was...two days ago?

Something like that.

"Uh. I'm gonna go lie down." Because he can't hold the coughing back much longer and asking his father for help was a dumb idea anyway.

Billy backpedals from the kitchen, swings his elbow over his mouth and coughs his way down the hall. It's a relief and it isn't. Probably be more of a relief if he could actually catch his breath on the other side of it but he just can't seem to rake in enough and the deeper he inhales, the sharper the stabs in his chest.

This shit fucking blows, ugh. Going to Neil is a seriously stupid idea though, scratch that plan. He'll just get more money and go back to the store for some medicine. Bound to be loose change in the couch cushions. And maybe he'll paw through Susan's purse after she goes to bed. Sure to be a couple stray bucks Billy can swipe without getting caught, right?

Maybe he could hit up Mrs. Wheeler. She's paid him for doing these miscellaneous chores for her before. Waxing her car. Mowing the lawn. With any luck it'll snow tonight and Billy can make a couple bucks shoveling her driveway in the morning...probably won't get the extra tip he's pretty sure he got for being shirtless doing the other

jobs, but still.

Billy plops onto the edge of the bed and picks up his pillow, stuffing another wet round of coughs into the fabric of the pillowcase. It's whatever, fraying polyester already dirty. Spotted with cold goopy gobs of phlegm that haven't fully dried yet.

The spasm keeps him so busy, he doesn't realize when his door opens. Actually startles when he lowers the pillow to see his father standing there, posture rigid, frown on his mouth and hands on his hips. He's not happy. Billy tenses and does his best to keep a neutral demeanor, wracking his brain to figure out what he did wrong and hoping this isn't a prelude to another round with the belt. His back is still sore and he feels shitty enough without adding any more bruises to the still healing collection.

"You sound terrible," Neil tells him.

Billy blinks, unsure what to say. Settles on a slight nod.

"Stand up, come here for a sec."

Billy draws himself to a stand and obeys. Tries not to flinch as his father palms his cheeks, the sides of his neck. Remains very still even when it hurts a little, his throat sorta tender, ripped raw from all the coughs.

"Well, hell, you're hot to the touch," Neil huffs eventually. "And you smell like a barn animal. When was the last time you showered?"

"...couple days ago."

Neil rubs a hand over his face, shaking his head in disbelief and disapproval. "Lord. Look at you, sleeping in the same clothes, haven't showered in days. You want to feel better? Take a damn shower, clean yourself up. I shouldn't have to tell you this, Billy."

Billy pauses, blinking slowly as he studies his father and tries to gauge his expression. Was that an order? Is he being ordered to shower?

"And what's this doing on the floor?" Neil steps away from him and

picks up the blue tub of vapor rub. “Don’t tell me you haven’t used it.”

“No, Dad, it’s expired.”

Neil raises an eyebrow. Billy turns away to cough into his fist. The fit squeezes like a boa constrictor coiling tight around his chest, fucking rib crushing. He’s definitely never been this sick before. He needs to sit back down. Then Neil’s got a hand on his shoulder, holding him in a ginger grip probably meant to steady.

Billy swallows the mucus-y gunk that comes up, doesn’t dare spit in front of his dad.

“You alright?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Yeah. That’s right, you’re alright, you’re a strong boy.” His father’s hand roams to his back and gives a few appreciative pats.

Billy’s bruises throb but he doesn’t make a sound, doesn’t even bat an eye, let alone wince.

“Tell you what, you take a shower, I’ll run out and get a new tub of cream. Get you some Tylenol, bottle of cough syrup. That sound like a deal?”

“Uh, yeah— I mean, yes. Yes, sir.” Billy blinks rapidly, struck between shock and relief.

“Get yourself cleaned up,” Neil instructs plainly. “Run the water cool, see if we can’t break that fever.”

Billy bobs his head.

“Alright, good. Don’t drag your feet. Sooner you clean yourself up, sooner you’ll feel better. At least a little and that’s better than nothing.” His father claps him on the shoulder and takes his exit.

Billy runs a hand through his hair, exhales a short, ratty breath. He’s kind of relieved. That he didn’t have to ask after all. That Neil’s just

going to go out and buy him some medicine. That he doesn't have to raid the house for spare change or flex for Mrs. Wheeler.

He gets himself a pair of lounge pants and this thermal waffle weave shirt that's ugly as heck but toasty warm. He'll shower like Neil told him to but fuck running it cool, Billy's cold to the bone. It's like he's got chips of ice in his marrow. If Neil's leaving, it's not like he'll know anyway.

Billy plods to the bathroom, nudges the door shut behind him. Lays a towel down. Cranks the faucet lever all the way to the hot side. Maybe the steam will actually help break up some of the congestion in his chest.

Showering is more or less an ordeal. Billy is exhausted and everything involved, the shampooing and the scrubbing, it's...effort. Not on a normal day, no, but...when he feels like his chest is packed with tar thick muck and he's just sore, and can't stop coughing even with the hot steam in the air, it is. The hot water doesn't soothe as much as he'd hoped but eventually he's clean. That should be enough for Neil.

Billy drags himself back to his room in the fresh clothes. He passes Susan in the hallway, and if he didn't know any better, he could swear the look she shoots him is irritated. But he's gotta be delirious or something because like, Susan is timid as a mouse around him. Doesn't ever display any hint of confrontation toward him or anything else besides cobwebs and dust bunnies.

Whatever.

Billy lets himself collapse onto the bed. Buries himself under the covers and flips the pillow over to the less gross side before he parks his head. Not long after Neil shows up, talking at him as he arranges everything he bought on Billy's nightstand.

"Don't be afraid to double dose if you have to," Neil says, shaking the bottle of cough syrup. "You're a hardy young man, having a little extra won't hurt you any."

Billy bobs his head. Forget double dose, as soon as Neil leaves the

room he's probably just gonna go ahead and chug it down. He's so sick of coughing all night. He's barely slept in days.

"I had Susan put some tea on for you. Don't roll your eyes, tea is good when you're sick. You need fluids. Been drinking fluids, right?"

Billy nods again. He'd had some water earlier, so. That counts.

"Good, good..." Neil's eyes glitter with approval.

Billy rolls onto his opposite side when he coughs to make sure nothing goes in his dad's direction, even though he's got his hand clamped firmly over his mouth. He doesn't really know what to make of this. Neil sitting on his bed, practically doting on him, what with, buying like a medicine cabinet worth of stuff. Loading his nightstand up with cough syrup, brand new tub of vapor rub, acetaminophen, melatonin tablets.

It's weird. Really weird. But also, like. Maybe. Nice.

Maybe it's kind of nice. Ooh, not so nice when Neil starts rubbing his back again. Billy tenses automatically and the sore flesh pulses in dull, discomforting throbs. But he doesn't protest.

When he rolls back over, Susan's here too, smiles at him nervously as she sets a ceramic cup down next to the bottle of cough syrup.

"It's still pretty hot," she warns. "You might want to blow on it."

Billy could say something shitty. He refrains because Neil is staring at him, head inclining with a pointed stare.

"What do you say?"

"Thank you, Susan," Billy mutters with as much sincerity as he can manage.

"I made a cup for you too, Neil," she adds warmly as she touches his father's shoulder. "Chamomile and lavender. I thought it'd help get you nice and relaxed for acupuncture."

"I still don't know about that stuff," he huffs, sounding amused more

than anything. “But thank you. I’ll be there in a minute.”

Susan nods and draws back, quietly padding out of the room.

Neil glances down to Billy, palms at his cheek for the second time tonight and frowns.

“Feeling pretty crappy, huh?”

“I’m fine,” Billy asserts. In truth he can’t conjure up any recent memory of feeling worse, but he won’t whine. Neil doesn’t take kindly to whining, didn’t set out to raise some poor excuse of a son who pissed and moaned like some colicky baby.

“Yeah, you’re okay, aren’t you?” Neil sighs, pulls his hand back.
“Course you’re okay, you’re tough. Like me.”

Billy doesn’t think the urge to gag is attributable to his illness. Neil stands up from the bed and brushes his hands off on his slacks.

“Well, I’m gonna go try this acupuncture mumbo jumbo to make Susan happy. Who knows, maybe it’ll actually relieve my stress. You, uh, you take your medicine and if you’re not feeling better in a week, we’ll call a doctor. Okay, Billy?”

“Okay, Dad.”

Neil nods and wheels around. Shuts the door behind him when he leaves. Billy sits up a bit and tears the plastic off the bottle of cough syrup. Unscrews the cap and just starts chugging, intent on actually getting a little peace. If only for tonight.

Author's Note:

hope it sufficed ur needs, friend!